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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM : AMCONGEN, Lagos, Nigeria. DESP. NO. 253

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. May 7, 1953

REF : Congen's Despatches 197 of February 13, and 224, 225 and 239 of April 8 and April 21, 1953.

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SUBJECT: Recent Developments in Nigerian National Politics

The period since the adjournment of the central House of Representatives, with the attendant walkouts of Eastern and Western members and resignations of Western members of the Council of Ministers over the issue of a resolution calling for self-government for Nigeria in 1956, has been characterized by a series of lengthy public statements by all factions concerned and fluttering gestures of cooperation between the Action Group and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). The tempo is expected to be speeded up by the regular meetings of the regional legislatures in the East and West beginning the first week in May. There are some evidences of the possibility of the leaders of the North yielding somewhat in their position toward the self-government motion; and, on the other hand, increasing talk among the political leaders of the West in regard to the possibility of a new Nigeria without the North and talk of resolute action to be taken in throwing off British control in 1956 with or without British consent. Sir John MACPHERSON, Governor of Nigeria, visited London by air between April 10th and 18th to confer with Colonial Office officials on the present constitutional stress, but no immediate results of the conferences are evident as yet.

Leading figures of both the Action Group and the NCNC have been most vitriolic, and in many cases, insulting, in their written and spoken comments in regard to the leaders of the North and the National Independence Party (made up of dissident ex-NCNCers from the east and some independents). Further, there have been almost as many public versions given of the events of the past few months as there have been speakers on the subject. Obafemi AWOLOWO has consistently served as the major "explainer" of the events which have taken place, although Nnamdi AZIKIWE has also chimed in with less lengthy or well-organized statements. The AG leader's major points have been as follows:

1. AHMADU, Sardauna of Sokoto, and other Northern leaders conferred with Western Region politicos between June, 1952 and early

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early February, 1953 with a view to achieving cooperation between the North and West in combatting the national instability being engendered in the Eastern Region. Premature release by the Action Group of the cooperation agreement signed did not break up the cooperation, although it did cause ill-feeling between the two groups.

2. There was no breach in the North-West agreement until after the recent self-government resolution was introduced into the House of Representatives by Tony ENAHORO (Action Group). Jaja WACHUKU, presently a leader of the NIP in the East, had attempted to come to an agreement with Northern leaders to utilize Northern strength in the House to overcome both the NCNC and the Action Group.

3. The North would not have opposed the self-government resolution as strongly as they did if Wachuku and the other "dangerous imperialist allies" had not worked to alarm the Emirs and other Northern leaders at the same time as Awolowo was trying to allay their fears and convince them that the West had no intentions of dominating the North.

4. The contention by NIP leaders that they attempted to obtain an agreement among the disagreeing factions in regard to the self-government resolution is untrue. The AG leader claims that no effort was made by the NIP to avoid the clash until after the walkouts, ministerial resignations and adjournment of the House session. Their late efforts in this direction were done, not to avoid a breach, but to obtain a coalition of persons which would be strong enough to defeat the true nationalists found in the Action Group, the NCNC, and the Northern Elements Peoples' Union (NEPU); thus throwing Nigeria to the camp of the British imperialists.

Awolowo and other AG leaders have also been outstandingly disrespectful and insulting in their criticisms of the attitudes and actions of the Governor in all of these events. Sir John has been referred to as "The most formidable obstacle to our (Nigerian) progress." It has been claimed that the Governor has had nothing but "detestation" for the Western ministers at the center and that he has utilized the compliant Northern ministers to compel the Western politicos to act in ways contrary to the nationalistic interests of Nigeria.

All of these contentions by Awolowo have been "me too'ed" by the NCNC during this period of "collaboration" between the two parties; and, of course, denied by both the NIP and the Northern leaders. Attempts are still being made--with some evidences of success--to completely discredit such men as NWAPA, NJOKU, ARIKPO

and

and Wachuku. This has taken the form of referring to them as "imperialist stooges," "political turncoats," "the sit tight ministers" and other such terms. It can easily be seen that there is no evidence at all of any conciliatory attitude on the part of the leaders of the AG and the NCNC, and this can probably be traced directly to the attitude of most of the Western leaders toward the possibility of splitting Nigeria into more than one country. Many of these men are fully convinced of the practicability of taking the Western Region off down the road to complete independence by herself at the faster rate which they think desirable, leaving the North to do just as they may wish.

At a meeting on April 14 members of the Western House of Chiefs held a special meeting at which they approved the terms of the 1956 self-government motion and commended the Western members of the House of Representatives for their attitude on the question. The meeting also voted a motion of confidence in the Oni of Ife, Bode THOMAS, S. L. AKINTOLA and A. PREST, who had resigned from the central cabinet. During the following week another group of traditional natural rulers held a special meeting on the crisis and came up with an entirely different plea. These leaders called upon the leaders of the Action Group and the NCNC to do all within their power to avoid widening the present North-South breach and avoid splitting Nigeria into separate political entities. As can be readily seen, there is not complete unity in the West on this issue, and Awolowo's stand is not wholly supported by all of the important political elements in the Region.

Also, at a special meeting of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) it was decided to recommend to the Northern members of th House of Representatives that they make another attempt to obtain a compromise at the August session of the House on the 1956 self-government motion. The Sardauna of Sokoto has contended from the outset that the Northern members of the House would vote in accordance with the wishes of the Northern people and that they had had no indication that the controversial motion would have been acceptable to the North as a whole. He said that had there been time to ascertain the North's attitude they might have voted differently in the House. These facts may make possible a resolution of part of the problem in August. However, there is no assurance that the coming meetings of the Western and Eastern Houses of Assembly will not produce a series of resolutions or motions which will make compromise even more difficult.

Members of the NCNC have spent the past few weeks traveling throughout the Eastern Region giving countless speeches explaining the party's actions at the last session of the regional legislature and attacking the independents and ex-NCNC'ers in an effort to assure party control of the forthcoming sessions of the legislature.

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It should be noted that the NCNC continues to win almost all of the elections held in the Region to fill various local government positions, and there is no reason to believe that party dominance in the East is being seriously challenged by other groups.

Meanwhile the Governor has taken steps to assure that the central Ministries continue to function with a minimum of dislocation resulting from the resignations of ministers. The portfolios of the former ministers have been re-allocated among the remaining cabinet members. Dr. E. M. L. ENDELEY (Cameroons), who was formerly a Minister without Portfolio has been given the Labor portfolio; O. Arikpo, Minister of Lands, Survey and Local Development has taken over the Communications portfolio; and Mallam Abubakar Tafawa BALEWA, Minister of Works, has taken over the Transport portfolio.

Mr. Henry HOPKINSON, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs, came to Nigeria for the recent Defense Conference, and took the opportunity to visit major towns in the country and to talk to various political leaders. In an address which he made prior to his departure, Hopkinson made it very clear that Sir John Macpherson was still exercising full powers as governor and would continue to do so; his (Hopkins') part in this picture being only to observe and give a report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. There is, he pointed out, no intention of taking control of the situation out of the hands of the Governor. The Minister also said that no special action would be taken on this problem by the Colonial Office now, as time would be needed to gain a clear view of the situation and to see into what position it would settle.

Erwin P. Keeler
American Consul General

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